

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee** held remotely on 9 February 2021 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Mr J Bruce (late arrival, 10.42am) Ms P Hadley
Mrs M Cockburn Mr B Lobban

In attendance:

Mrs K Lackie, Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance
Mr D Gallagher, Business Gateway Service & Development Manager
Mr A Webster, Principal Regeneration Officer
Ms S MacLennan, Housing Manager (South)
Ms S Murdoch, Common Good Fund Officer
Mrs L Dunn, Principal Administrator, Chief Executive's Office

Also in attendance:

Mr M Ferguson, Director of Planning & Rural Development, Cairngorms National Park Authority
Ms K Derrick, Chief Officer, Voluntary Action Badenoch & Strathspey
Mr R Nixon, Group Commander Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

An asterisk in the margin denotes a recommendation to the Council. All decisions with no marking in the margin are delegated to the Committee.

Mr B Lobban in the Chair

BUSINESS

**1. Apologies for Absence
Leisgeulan**

There were no apologies for absence.

**2. Declarations of Interest
Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt**

Item 5: Ms P Hadley (non-financial)
Item 9: Ms P Hadley (financial)

**3. Notices of Motion
Brathan Gluasaid**

The following Notice of Motion had been received by the Head of Corporate Governance –

That Members of the Badenoch & Strathspey Area Committee recognise and fully support the efforts of Highland Council staff in delivering Council services while continuing to support partner organisations and our communities during the period of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Signed: Mr B Lobban Mrs M Cockburn Ms P Hadley Mr J Bruce

During discussion, concern was expressed that the significant efforts by staff to deliver services were not being recognised. However, it was clearly evident that staff had a strong work and team ethic and continued to deliver vital services to local communities despite the difficult circumstances such as the prolonged period of bad weather and the ongoing response to the pandemic. Members expressed their appreciation and commended staff for their efforts, recognising they often went beyond the call of duty, to ensure the continued delivery of Council services.

The Committee **AGREED** the terms of the Notice of Motion as detailed.

4. Business Gateway Slighe Gnothachais

There was a verbal update provided by the Business Gateway Service and Development Manager on the current support being provided by Business Gateway Highland during the current Covid-19 pandemic. It was explained that delivery of business grants had primarily been provided by the Economy and Regeneration team along with additional support from other Council services including Finance, Internal Audit Fraud and Digital Services. To date the team had processed grants of approximately £85m to over 8,000 businesses, many of which had received multiple grants, and staff were commended for their efforts and also the partnership working that was now fully engaged and had been invaluable. A general overview of the Business Gateway service was provided including the 1,600 businesses that had been receiving support and also the 152 business start-ups which was 50% lower than compared with same period last year. Prior to Covid, Highland was the only Business Gateway service in Scotland delivering support for business start-up workshops online in addition to a variety of webinars, tutorials and podcasts to support businesses. In addition, work was ongoing to develop specific webinars on mental health and Brexit. Moving out of lockdown, the challenge would be to transition businesses from survival to investment mode and funding options to support this would be sought as well as helping businesses to manage change and become more resilient. In conclusion, he encouraged all businesses and elected Members to sign up to the Business Gateway newsletter and their Facebook page which gave updates and information on all the support services available locally.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- The Chair thanked the Business Gateway Service and Development Manager for his presentation and requested that he provide the Committee with details of the Business Gateway website and social media pages;
- Positive feedback had been received from many local businesses for the help and support they had received in responding to Covid from Business Gateway. However, it was highlighted that the need for this professional support would be ongoing, particularly following the lockdown and in response to Brexit, therefore the importance of ensuring that the Business Gateway service was adequately resourced going forward was emphasised;
- Further information was sought and provided on the response to fraudulent applications; and

- It was felt that the Business Gateway service was an excellent example of a responsive business model that was able to adapt and respond to change.

The Committee **NOTED** the presentation and **AGREED** that the Business Gateway website and social media details be emailed to the Committee.

5. Presentation: Badenoch Heritage Great Places Project
Taisbeanadh: Pròiseact Dualchais agus Sàr Àiteachan Bhàideanach

Declaration of Interest – Ms P Hadley declared a non-financial interest in this item as a Board member of Badenoch Heritage Great Place Project but having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors’ Code of Conduct, concluded that her interest did not preclude her from taking part in the discussion.

There was a presentation by Murray Ferguson, Director of Planning and Rural Development, Cairngorms National Park Authority and Karen Derrick, Chief Officer, Voluntary Action Badenoch & Strathspey (VABS), giving an update on the progress of the Badenoch Great Places Project.

The presentation included details on the four project aims; an update on the work and summary of the projects that had been undertaken so far during 2018-2020; development of the website and mobile app which would be launched in April 2021 and also the augmented reality; and the work planned for the final nine months of the project which included the embedding of the legacy of the project in the community.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- The impressive work of the project was welcomed and it was indicated that this initiative provided the opportunity to generate a variety of benefits, particularly to rural communities, and should therefore be replicated across other areas of the Highlands;
- The importance of digital marketing, particularly internationally, was emphasised and information was sought and provided on whether there had been a greater online interest in the Project due to Covid. Further information was also sought and provided on the feasibility of accessing and working with schools digitally;
- Confirmation was provided that the Project was working collaboratively with partners on the green health agenda;
- The Project had been extremely informative and had enabled many hidden places of historical interest to be uncovered and generated significant levels of positive local engagement;
- Confirmation was provided that local businesses were being encouraged to sign-up to the App which mapped local services and attractions available; and
- It was important that success of the Project was shared across all areas of Badenoch and Strathspey including the more remote areas and that important historic places were recognised.

The Committee **NOTED** the presentation.

6. **Scottish Fire and Rescue Area Committee Performance Report**
Aithisg Coileanaidh Comataidh Sgìreil Smàlaidh agus Teasairginn na h-Alba airson

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/01/21 dated 15 January 2021 by the Area Commander.

The Committee welcomed the overall good performance as set out in the report, however, concern was expressed at the significant increase in deliberate fires during July and August 2020. It was anticipated that pressures on the tourist areas would increase during the forthcoming season and concern was expressed that the wild camping problems that had been experienced during the previous year would continue. It was therefore queried what action could be taken to encourage visitors to act responsible and the establishment of a multi-agency partnership working group to develop a joint strategy to address this issue was welcomed. In addition, further information was sought and provided on the processes available for responsible reporting and the promotion of this to the public.

Further information was also sought and provided on whether there had been any additional interest in recruitment due to increased levels of furlough/unemployment.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the attached Area Performance report.

7. **Town Centre Fund**
Maoin Meadhan a' Bhaile

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/02/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

During discussion, Members welcomed this additional funding and recognised the benefits this would bring to local communities. Communities were urged to have 'shovel ready' projects prepared in the event of further funding being available in the future. Members also expressed their appreciation to the Principal Regeneration Officer for the work that had been undertaken in processing and scrutinising the applications.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** that the Badenoch and Strathspey Area had been allocated £112,208 of funding and the four eligible areas for Town Centre Fund investment were Aviemore, Grantown on Spey, Kingussie and Newtonmore; and
- ii. **AGREED** that the undernoted projects be allocated a Town Centre Fund grant (the value of funds to be offered in each case as highlighted):-

Aviemore Village Green

Hard landscaping works to the Village Green - **£29,300**

Aviemore War Memorial

Improvement works, including groundworks, natural stone planters, steps from the main street to memorial, new paving, poppy sculpture, memorial poppy wreath stand and stand and electrics for Christmas tree - **£24,504**

Grantown Square

Supply and installation of new electrical ducting and cabling to replace existing faulty network in the Square - **£7,570**

Caberfeidh Horizons, Kingussie

Physical improvements to the community hub consisting of a new front door and eight replacement windows - **£22,000**

Gynack Gardens

Environmental improvement works to the Gardens - **£10,350**

Market Stance Playing Field, Kingussie

To contribute towards a project to upgrade the Market Stance Playing Field - **£10,000**

Newtonmore War Memorial

To improve accessibility to the War Memorial - **£8,000**

**8. Housing Revenue Account: Garage Rents 2021/22
Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Taigheadais: Màil Gharaidsean 2020/21**

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/03/21 dated 5 January 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

During discussion, it was suggested that in future consideration should be given to having a larger increase for non-housing tenants in order that any rises for tenants were kept to a minimum. It was further suggested that consideration should also be given to how the Council was reimbursed from non-tenants and it was clarified that, following a change to policy, Council tenants were given first priority in respect of vacant garages.

Thereafter, the Committee **AGREED** a 2% rent increase to be applied to Badenoch and Strathspey Garages.

**9. Housing Performance Report – 1 April 2020 to 31 December 2020
Aithisg Coileanaidh Taigheadais – 1 An Giblean gu 31 An Dubhlachd 2020**

Declaration of Interest – Ms P Hadley declared a financial interest in this item as a Council house tenant but, in terms of the dispensation granted by the Standards Commission, remained in the room to participate in the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/04/21 dated 14 January 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- although the diligent efforts of the team were welcome, concern was expressed at the increasing rent arrears trend and how this was likely to be compounded due to the significant increase in demand for Universal Credit and increasing fuel costs. Further information was sought and provided on how this would be managed;
- The impact of Covid on Maintenance repairs was recognised and the support provided from staff via the Emergency Repairs hotline was commended; and
- It was confirmed that the Allocations process was longer due to the implementation of additional Covid secure measures.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance for the period 1 April 2020 to 31 December 2020.

**10. Kingussie and Grantown on Spey Common Good Funds
Maointean Math Coitcheann Cheann a' Ghiùthsach agus Bhaile nan
Granndach**

There had been circulated Joint Report No BSAC/05/21 dated 26 January 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place and Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- It was recognised that this was the initial stages of the process but this could generate substantial benefits for both Kingussie and Grantown on Spey which was positive for the future;
- Although the cash amounts in both funds were small, there were a number of other allocations of funding which had been amalgamated into the overall Highland-wide fund and it was queried whether these could be reassigned to the Kingussie/Grantown on Spey Common Good Fund;
- It was noted that the Kingussie Provost Chain had been recorded as an asset and it was queried whether the ownership of the Grantown on Spey Provost Chain, which was currently in the care of Grantown Museum, would be assigned to the Grantown on Spey Common Good Fund;
- Further information was sought and provided on property that was considered inalienable and the ease/flexibility of the process to change their use; and
- It was noted that there were a number of small dormant trusts and it was queried whether it would be feasible to approach the lawyers that managed these to ascertain if it would be feasible to incorporate these into the common good funds.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the contents of the list of property proposed to be included in the Common Good Asset Register for Kingussie (Appendix 1);
- ii. **AGREED** the commencement of the public consultation on the list of proposed property for Kingussie in accordance with the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015;

- iii. **NOTED** the position regarding the ongoing investigations into Common Good property in Grantown on Spey; and
- iv. **AGREED** that the Committee continue to be kept informed of progress.

**11. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas**

There had been circulated and **NOTED** Minutes of Meeting of the Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee held on 9 November 2020 which were approved by the Council on 7 January 2021.

The meeting was closed at 12.23pm.